



*Office of the United States Attorney  
District of Arizona*  
**José de Jesus Rivera**

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**January 18, 2001**

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### **TRW HAZARDOUS WASTE VIOLATIONS RESULT IN RECORD FINES**

**PHOENIX, ARIZONA** - United States Attorney José de Jesus Rivera and the Department of Justice announced today the civil settlement and criminal plea agreement of TRW Vehicle Safety Systems, Inc. (TRW) for charges in violation of hazardous waste laws at its Queen Creek, Arizona facility. TRW uses sodium azide, a toxic and potentially volatile compound to manufacture vehicle airbag restraint systems at its facility. Sodium azide is a component of the propellant that inflates the airbag. In violation of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, TRW improperly stored and disposed of the wastes containing sodium azide.

Vehicle Safety Systems, Inc. a wholly owned subsidiary of Michigan-based TRW Inc., pleaded guilty to Federal and State criminal charges today in U. S. District Court. TRW will pay a \$6 million criminal penalty to the United States and a \$6 million criminal penalty to the State of Arizona. The plea agreement also requires TRW to establish an environmental management system at two airbag factories in Arizona and one in Nevada.

In a civil action, TRW agreed to pay \$5.6 million penalty that will be divided between the United States and State of Arizona. In the agreement filed by the Justice Department, on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the State of Arizona, on behalf of the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, TRW is obligated to perform more than \$5.7 million worth of projects to

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enhance the environment, and contribute \$1.5 million to clean up the Butterfield landfill in Mobile, Arizona that is contaminated as a result of hazardous waste produced by TRW.

The company will complete a comprehensive assessment of its Mesa facility, determine whether corrective measures are needed to address pollution, and undertake any necessary measures at the site, specifically, closure of surface impoundments and related sumps and tanks. The cleanup of this site is estimated to cost up to \$12 million.

In the criminal plea agreement, the company admitted that it knew the Butterfield landfill as not authorized to accept such waste and that the sodium azide-contaminated waste was potentially harmful to the public and the environment. Additionally, TRW admitted that it knew it was illegal to store this waste onsite at its facility without a permit.

TRW agreed to create an environmental management system plan at its three plants, to ensure that the company does not commit future violations. As part of the plan, the company will hire an auditor to evaluate its operations and report to State and Federal regulators. TRW agreed to inform the public of the company's illegal actions, the fact it was convicted, and steps it will take to prevent such actions in the future.

United States Attorney Jose de Jesus Rivera stated, ***“These fines represent the largest ever imposed in this district under the nation’s hazardous waste law. I believe this will send a clear message that violation of environmental laws will not be tolerated in this state. Our future and the future of our children depends upon how we deal with the environmental problems today.”***

The civil settlement is subject to a 30-day public comment period and final approval by the Court. The criminal plea agreement also must be approved by the Court.

Prosecution of this case was handled by Department of Justice Environmental Crimes Section and the United States Attorney's Office, District of Arizona, with assistance of the State Attorney General's office.

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